

Stay

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Summary: We can't always stay with the ones we love, no matter how much we love them or how much they'd be willing to die to protect us. Sometimes fate takes us before our time, and Toothless can't understand why they'd take Hiccup when he wanted to stay.

Stay

Toothless had to say the best time of his life was after the Green Death was defeated, when he settled into what he considered would be his normal life for the rest of his life. And he had the greatest life in the world. Best of all, he knew it too. It was in the way he strutted around the village, head held high, and eyes keen and bright as gazed at the other Vikings. This "best life ever" was all thanks to Hiccup; all the fish he could ever want, all the new friends and playmates he had acquired in the other dragons and the Viking children, and, of course, the best friend any dragon could ever ask for. Hiccup was the greatest combination of a caretaker, friend, and playmate Toothless had ever had, and he felt confident that he would be dogging Hiccup's footsteps as his protector for the rest of his days.

The fall harvest was in full swing, and though Toothless certainly liked to help with hauling in the few crops and butchering the last of the livestock, sometimes things got a little too hectic or he would be shooed at for getting in the way. So, he thought it best to retreat to the cove for a few days. And right on cue, Hiccup showed up with a basket of fish. As soon as Toothless caught sight of him, he bounded across the cove, nudging Hiccup and twining himself around the young Viking eagerly.

"Suck up," Hiccup huffed, "You didn't really miss me, you just want the fish."

Toothless thumped his tail happily, bouncing around until the basket was dumped and the fish spilled out. It wasn't until he finished them

that he noticed something was off. Hiccup was sitting a little off to the side, leaning against a rock with his journal open and charcoal pencil loosely gripped in his fingers. His head had lolled down until his chin was touching his chest. Toothless realized he was asleep.

Snorting indignantly, feeling he was being ignored somehow, Toothless trotted over to Hiccup's side and barked sharply. However, Hiccup didn't budge. Confused, Toothless barked again, and this time Hiccup gasped awake, looking around confusedly and rubbing his eyes.

"Sorry, bud," he apologized, "Must have been working harder than I thought. Does the sun seem brighter to you? It's making my head hurt."

When Hiccup's green eyes met the green eyes of Toothless, the dragon had to stop himself from recoiling. His rider's eyes looked very strange; bloodshot, like he was exhausted, glazed, and it looked like they were having trouble focusing. He kept rubbing them, whether to clear his vision or to keep himself awake, Toothless didn't know. The dragon sniffed Hiccup, and he smelled strange too. Hiccup had always smelled like a warm, clean, spring. Now he smelled too warm, and it was like a hint of some stinking water plant was tainting the cleanness of his scent. Toothless nudged the side of Hiccup's head and warbled worriedly.

"Oh hush," Hiccup assured him, "I have enough people thinking I'm going to keel over because I told them my head hurts. Don't you start worrying too."

Toothless wished he could tell him that one of his many new jobs as Hiccup's dragon was to worry about him, but all he could do was lick his cheek.

The next day, Hiccup didn't show up at all.

Toothless immediately became very worried and paced around the cove all morning. He only stopped when the sound of scraping over the rocks caught his attention, and the padding of feet coming towards him a moment later. However, the source of the sound wasn't Hiccup; it was Astrid.

"Hey Toothless," she greeted with a smile, "I'm supposed to feed you this morning it looks like. Here you go."

She dumped the basket of fish she was carrying for him, but Toothless didn't touch it. He tilted his head at her rumbled questioningly. When Astrid just shook her head, Toothless came up to her and began to sniff her, nose twitching, wondering why she was here instead of Hiccup. It wasn't that he didn't like Astrid. Hiccup liked her and the happy feelings he emanated whenever the blond Viking was around got to Toothless and made him happy too. Plus, she gave amazing belly rubs. The two of them would spend so much time together that sometimes their scents would rub off on each other, so that meantâ€¦|

He stopped at her right hand, smelling traces of Hiccup's scent on it. He shoved his nose under it and warbled insistently. He licked it and pulled away, and rumbled questioningly again. Astrid regarded her

hand thoughtfully for a moment, and then understood.

"You smell Hiccup, don't you?" she said. At the sound of his rider's name, Toothless wiggled his body and thumped his tail. "I was holding his hand with that hand this morning and last night. Oh Toothless," she sighed.

When she didn't say anything more other than to tell him to eat his fish, Toothless did so. When he was finished, Astrid played with him for a while by letting her axe reflect the sunlight and watching the dragon chase after the light spot on the ground. She gave him a good scratching and lots of cuddles, even accepting a few kisses. She was trying so hard to do everything Hiccup told her that Toothless liked so he wouldn't feel lonely.

"I have to go now Toothless, but I'll be back later to feed you again," Astrid said, getting up to leave, "The harvest slows down for no one."

She only made it a few steps before Toothless whined and began to follow her. Astrid sighed sadly.

"No, stay here," she ordered gently, placing her palm on his nose, the one that still had Hiccup's smell on it. Toothless whined louder and pressed against her hand. "Don't worry. Hiccup will be back to care of you before you know it."

But Hiccup didn't come back. For the next couple of days Toothless would wait for his human friend to appear through the brush, and every time he was disappointed. Though Astrid was good company, it wasn't the same. Hiccup was the one he wanted to see, the one he wanted to follow through the village like an overgrown peacock because he was so proud of his friend, to fly with like the two of them never had to come back to earth ever again, to lick until his entire face was covered in dragon spit, and then Toothless would laugh hysterically because it was fun to be affectionate and bratty in one motion.

Toothless had had enough. He didn't care if the harvest was going on and he was in people's way. Something was very wrong and he aimed to find out what it was.

He made his way into the village under the cover of darkness, invisible and silent. Toothless made it to Hiccup's home without being seen by anyone except for a few surprised sheep. Hiccup's smell was very strong inside, and Toothless knew he was in there. Without hesitating, he began scratching at the door and leaning against it hard enough to make the hinges squeal in protest. A minute later, he heard Hiccup's voice call out from within, and Toothless called back excitedly. He began scratching again with gusto, prepared to tear the door down if necessary.

However, it appeared he wouldn't have to, because Stoick opened the door. Toothless hesitated for a moment, stunned at his appearance. The chief of Berk never looked completely tidy, but he was a mess. His face was drawn and pale, and he looked like he had aged ten years in just a few days. His beard was sticking out every which way (well, more than usually) and it looked like he had a mountain weighing down his shoulders.

"I should 'ave known," Stoick said. Even his voice sounded heavy and unused. "He's been wonderin' where ya were, ya great bloody lizard. Get in here."

Even if he hadn't been invited in, Toothless had planned on shoving his way past Stoick to get to his boy. A smile was on his toothless face and his tail was thumping excitedly.

Both his smile and his tail dropped when the sour smell of sickness hit him like an iron wall.

Toothless immediately began to croon worriedly when he caught sight of Hiccup lying in a makeshift bed near the fire. His scrawny little body was almost drowning in all manner of furs and woven blankets, only the top head of his head peeking out. But from Toothless could see, his eyebrows were pinched with pain, and his forehead was clammy and shining with sweat. His hair looked stiff and dull, and his eyes were shut. Hiccup was propped up by what looked like every pillow in the whole village. Toothless murmured softly and touched his nose to Hiccup's head.

Hiccup's eyes opened, (they were still glassy and bloodshot) and the blanket lowered to reveal a tired, crooked smile.

"Hey bud!" he greeted. His voice was enthusiastic and happy but raspy and exhausted. Toothless perked up and gave him a lick. "How are you? I missed you, I'm sorry I couldn't come see you, I got sick a few days ago and"-

Toothless gave him another lick, this one much more sloppy and leaving behind a lot more drool, effectively shutting Hiccup up. He just pressed his face against his boy's chest, letting himself be hugged and relishing it.

Hiccup pulled away abruptly, his white face going whiter and calling for his dad. Stoick was at his side immediately, noticing the arm Hiccup had wrapped around his stomach and scrabbled for a bowl. Toothless looked between Hiccup, the bowl, and Stoick frantically, whimpering. Stoick had placed a hand on his son's back while Hiccup hung his head over the bowl. Toothless watched as the boy's back began to heave and he began to whimper wretchedly. Toothless knew the feeling; the sensation of the walls of your stomach clenching and pumping until your food was forced unnaturally up your throat was not a pleasant one. Hiccup spat into the bowl several times, trying not to cry from the pain but failing, until he vomited in earnest.

It went on for what seemed like hours, and just when they thought it was over it turned out Hiccup had more to bring up. To top it off, he had a coughing fit near the end of the episode, and there he was, coughing up thick wads of mucus and puking thin streams of bile, crying the entire time.

When it ended, Hiccup flopped, boneless, back onto the blankets, gasping for breath but finding little in his fluid clogged lungs. His face was covered in sweat and tears and snot, and before Stoick could even go for a cloth, Toothless tenderly licked his boy's face clean.

Once Hiccup was wiped down and given some water, it was understatement to say he was exhausted and ready to fall back into

oblivion. He reached for Toothless pitifully.

"Stay," he begged, and Toothless didn't have to be told twice. He wrapped himself around the pallet, curling up around Hiccup so that his head was by his and his wings were covering him in an extra layer of warmth. Without another word, Toothless watched as Hiccup's wheezing breaths grew steadier and he fell asleep.

After a few beats of silence, Stoick sighed heavily and ran a hand over his face. "I take it you'll watch over him tonight?"

Toothless gave a growl of assent and wrapped his tail and tighter, protectively. Stoick smiled and patted Toothless on top of the head, and the dragon shut his eyes at the gesture.

"M'boy's lucky to have ya," he said, and then retired to his room for some much needed rest.

Toothless sighed, and laid his head next to Hiccup's, overjoyed at being with him again.

The next several days were an endless blur for Toothless. They seemed to stretch on for small eternities, but Toothless only remembered highlights, like the bad coughing fits Hiccup had that left him in pain and unable to breathe for several minutes, or the times the poor boy was so out of it that he lost control of his bladder and wet the pallet and blubbered apologies for an hour afterwards. He remembered the potent fever dreams Hiccup would have and the boy's hours of crying and wheezing as a result. He remembered the delirium, Hiccup's back arching as if he were possessed and eyes bulging as he witnessed some unspeakable horror only he could see. And Toothless remembered his every attempt to comfort his rider and failing miserably during each of these times. Yet he still remained faithfully wrapped around him, keeping his boy warm, safe, and protected, trying to make the sickness go away in the only manner he knew how.

One night, Hiccup stopped coughing.

His breath rattled in his lungs and his windpipe was too swollen for him to speak much above a whisper. He was so pale and so hot, his fever reaching its highest pitch yet, and his normally pink lips had faded to a dull grey. Stoick and Astrid were both there, tending to Hiccup and talking to him, both of them trying not to cry. Toothless didn't understand why they were trying not to cry and didn't understand why his rider was getting worse instead of better. He was growing very frightened, covering Hiccup's face in little frantic licks because it was the only thing he could think of to do to make him feel better. He also knew Hiccup had told him to stay with him on several occasions and had heard the fear in the little Viking's voice, and Toothless knew that if Hiccup wanted him to stay with him it would take Ragnarok to separate them.

Hiccup moaned weakly and Toothless was ready to tend to any need that was in his power to fulfill. His eyes were open a crack, and he smiled when he saw his dragon was still there.

"Hi bud," he whispered. A hand snuck from under the blankets, and Toothless brought his nose forward to meet it. After a moment, he snuffled at Hiccup's hair and snorted, before running his tongue over it.

"Thanks," Hiccup said, "I know it's dirty. Thanks for reminding me."

His boy heaved a weary sigh. "I'm tired Toothless, but I'm afraid to go to sleep. I don't want to"-

He stopped short. Toothless whickered low in his throat, sensing his fear and wanting to help, but he didn't know what he was afraid of and he didn't know how to help. He settled for pressing his nose against Hiccup's cheek and breathing soft, comforting breaths against him.

Astrid came in a moment later, taking Hiccup's hand and asking him how he was feeling.

"Hot," he replied, "Tired."

"Oh sweetheart," she sighed, running her fingers through his damp hair, and Toothless didn't fail to notice how he closed his eyes and leaned into this gesture.

"I don't want to go, Astrid," Hiccup said plaintively. He clutched one of his blankets a little tighter and likewise tightened his grip on her hand.

"You're not going anywhere," she laughed, "Why? Who told you you're going somewhere? Want me to beat them up?"

Hiccup tried to laugh but failed miserably, tears bubbling up instead and slipping down his cheeks.

"You know what I mean," he said in a voice so quiet the crackling of the fire was louder.

Astrid narrowed her eyes and held his hand with both of hers and pulled it to her chest.

"You listen here, Hiccup Haddock," she said with steel in her voice, "You're not leaving for anywhere. I've got you, and Toothless has got you andâ€¦I'll kill you if you leave me. I can't stand any of the other guys in this village, so you have to stay so I can bother you for years and years, and give you a ton of grey hairs, and make you laugh, andâ€¦make you happy."

Tears were flowing down her face now too, and she tightened her grip on his hand until her knuckles were white.

"You feel how hard I'm holding your hand? You're not going anywhere. I'd love to see anyone try to take you from me and Toothless. I'll beat up Thor and Odin and all the Valkyries to keep them from getting you. And they'll be so scared of me they'll piss themselves and leave!"

Astrid leaned forward and kissed his forehead desperately, using her free arm to hold him to her breast while her other still clutched his hand like a lifeline.

"You're staying," she said firmly, and Toothless didn't know if she was saying this to Hiccup or someone else, and he also didn't know

why it was so important for Hiccup to stay. Where would he go? Who could get past the two of them to take him? And Hiccup was too sick to get up and leave anyway.

"I'm staying," Hiccup repeated into her hair, the tears evident in his weak little voice. She was right. She had to be right. How could he leave when he was held here by so much love he felt his heart would burst from it? He settled into her, not comfortable, but cozy with a head filled with the smells of the most important people in his life.

He was safe. Nothing was going to take him away. _He was safe._ And sleepyâ€|so sleepyâ€|

A little while later, despite his best efforts to stay awake, Hiccup drifted off to sleep with Astrid wrapped around him and Toothless wrapped around them both. The dragon felt the sorrow rolling off the girl in waves, and fell asleep not understanding why she was so sad. Hiccup was perfectly safe and would stay. Wasn't that what she wanted?

Toothless woke to the sound of utter silence. His ears practically rang with it.

He lifted his head to see shaft of morning sunlight coming through a window and the smoldering ashes of the fire. He must have been tired last night; he never usually slept this late.

Instantly, his gaze went to Hiccup. He was still asleep too and still nestled in Toothless' protective embrace. The dragon sighed, letting his breath ruffle Hiccup's hair. Suddenly, his ears perked, catching the sound of Astrid crying coming from the other room. Another voice was layered over hers; it sounded like Stoick's, and his voice was gentle, but thick with tears as well. Huh.

Toothless shook his head, and then leaned down to give his rider a little lick, figuring since he had slept so late he had to be hungry by now, or had to go to the bathroom, or both, and since Astrid and Stoick weren't here, Toothless would have to take care of him.

But Hiccup wasn't moving. Not even a twitch. He must really be tired, Toothless thought, and licked him again, and again, and he still wouldn't wake up. He pressed his head against Hiccup's and gave it a little nudge, snorting in surprise when it lolled back into place.

Now Toothless was growing more than a little worried and confused. He tested the temperature of Hiccup's skin with his tongue again to find it much cooler than what it was last night but still warm against his scales. That meant his fever had broken last night and he was getting better, right? So why were Astrid and Stoick crying?

The two of them came into the room a moment later, faces blotchy and eyes red with still-escaping tears. Toothless was still covering Hiccup's face in little frantic licks, trying to get him to wake up and growing more worried by the second. Something didn't smell right. Hiccup was better and yet he wasn't moving no matter how much Toothless licked him and nuzzled him and crooned at him to wake up and something was very wrong. Toothless looked at them helplessly, whining and thumping his tail anxiously. Stoick strode forward and

placed his hand on the dragon's head.

"You're a loyal beast," he said, voice thick with tears, "Ya did your job and ya did it well. We'll take it from here, alright?"

Toothless didn't know what he meant by that. However, when Stoick moved forward and began to lift Hiccup up and away, Toothless shrieked. Stoick jumped backwards, letting go of Hiccup and looking up to see the big, black dragon curling up even tighter around his boy, leaning his head over him and baring his teeth slightly. Yet, the malice didn't reach his eyes. He just looked scared, and he didn't know why Stoick was trying to take Hiccup away. Hiccup had promised he would stay, and Toothless would protect him.

Another attempt yielded similar results, and so did another attempt. Even Astrid sitting down at Toothless' head and trying to distract him didn't work. Toothless felt betrayed. She had promised to help protect Hiccup, and she was trying to take him away too? She couldn't, because Hiccup was alright. He was just a little tired was all. Illnesses made people tired.

Eventually, they had to bring in several other Vikings and wrestle Toothless away, muzzling him in the process. Still, the dragon screamed and thrashed, trying with every fiber in his being to get to his boy, whom Stoick was lifting off the pallet and cradling in his arms the way one would a newborn, giant shoulders shaking with sobs the entire time. Astrid remained at the struggling dragon's head, trying to calm him down.

She threw her arms about his muzzle and cried, "Hush now, just let him go, Toothless. Let him go. You can't protect him anymore. He's beyond your protection now, don't you see that? And mine too. Please don't fight so much, you know Hiccup wouldn't want you to do that. Easy now, shhâ€¦"

Toothless settled after a moment, exhausting himself, but the Vikings continued to wisely restrain him. Astrid kept stroking his muzzle, and watched as those huge green eyes rolled up to regard her. They were sad and questioning, and a pitiful little warbling whine came from him. The way he was looking at her, it was almost as if he was asking, "Hiccup? Where's my boy? Why'd they take him?"

And Astrid couldn't answer because she didn't have an answer.

Toothless was kept in the house all day while one Viking or another stayed with him and tried to get him to eat. But the dragon refused to eat until Hiccup walked through those doors. He pouted sulkily, frustrated because he knew everyone knew why he was upset, but refused to produce the one person he longed to see.

He was also upset because he had failed to honor Hiccup's wish, which was to stay. He wanted to stay, and Toothless couldn't make it so. He failed to protect him. But he lightened his heart by telling himself that when Hiccup came back, he would make it up to him. They would go on a nice moonlit flight, and Astrid could come too because Toothless knew the pretty girl made his rider happy.

Stoick appeared in the doorway, and over his shoulder, Toothless could see that it was night. The Viking chief's face was still wet,

but there was no rain tonight.

"The funeral's over with," he told the Viking keeping watch over Toothless, "His pyre is on its way out to sea. You can let Toothless go now."

The Viking removed the muzzle, and like a black shot Toothless had shoved his way past Stoick and out into the night. He immediately picked out Hiccup's scent and began sniffing the air desperately, determined to find his boy. He would go to the ends of the Earth if he had to, but he would find him.

His nose led him to a cliff that looked out over the sea where a small, glowing speck was seen wading out toward the horizon. The scent continued into the wind, and Toothless wanted to follow it, but knew he couldn't fly without Hiccup. Suddenly terrified and feeling bereft as he never had before, Toothless began to call out for Hiccup, roaring the dragon's version of his rider's name into the night, as well as pleas for him to come home.

When his calls went unanswered, Toothless dejectedly flopped down onto his belly, watching the lit raft until it winked out of existence onto the horizon. He felt lost, but for some reason his sense of loyalty burned stronger than ever. He straightened up and stiffened his back.

Hiccup would come home, he knew, because Hiccup was just as loyal to his dragon and Toothless was to him. And Toothless knew he had enjoyed their flights as much as he did, and all the belly rubs, and all the walks, and

And if Hiccup wanted to stay, then Toothless would stay as well. He sat down, set his eyes on the horizon, and began to wait for his friend's return.

End
file.